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ABSTRACT

This report is based on information obtained from a survey conducted by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education and provides a brief overview of the different programmatic approaches to bias reduction and violence prevention. The characteristics of the projects are discussed in terms of their underlying philosophy, the issues covered, training methods used, and the targeted populations. It explains that different philosophies drive these projects, and that, although most training programs deal with all the issues--prejudice, bias, conflict resolution, discrimination reduction, and violence prevention--the emphasis placed on any one issue can greatly vary from program to program. Training methods also vary among programs from interaction between trainer and trainees to sole reliance on scripted programs. Important points in selecting a particular project are to understand that a project's underlying philosophy will significantly influence the target population being trained and that the service packages of the various projects differ as much as their programs do. To make the right match between program and target audience, therefore, it is important to gain as much detailed information as possible about every aspect of the project. (Contains 4 references.) (GLR)

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ANTI-BIAS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION CURRICULA: THEORY AND PRACTICE

A common saying among educators working to promote children's appreciation of diversity is that there is no gene for racism. Thus, they believe that even though children may initially develop and act on intolerant attitudes, they can be educated to value human differences.

At an early age, children notice differences among the people around them, often in relation to their own characteristics (Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992). They soon become aware that certain human differences are connected with power and privilege, while others cause people to be treated less respectfully (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989). In addition, they are more apt to be taught that intolerance is an acceptable reaction to diversity than how to deal creatively and nonviolently with conflict, anger, and other unpleasant emotions (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994). As a result, young children may develop "pre-prejudice": misconceptions, discomfort, fear, and rejection of differences that can blossom into full-fledged prejudice if they are not helped to overcome their initial negative feelings (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989). Moreover, given "the relative imperviousness of adult prejudice to the effects of conflicting evidence and experience," it appears that predispositions acquired at early developmental levels may lay a potent foundation for later racism (Katz, 1982, p. 18).

Tolerance, Conflict Resolution, and Violence Prevention Education

The recent increase in youth hatred suggests that these predispositions are stronger in children and adolescents today than in the past. In addition, given easier access to more powerful weapons, the consequences of violent reactions to these feelings are more severe.

Thus, a large number of educators, and community and religious leaders, are now committed to teaching children how to overcome prejudices and to manage anger constructively. Indeed, conflict resolution curricula are becoming known as the fourth "R," for "resolution." While programs to prevent youth bias crimes have been in use for decades, in the last five years their number has grown dramatically; national estimates now top 1,000.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education recently conducted a survey to identify anti-bias projects providing services nationally to schools and organizations, and those with programs easily replicable by local educators. The result is *A Directory of Anti-Bias Education Resources* and Services, comprised of profiles of 52 such projects. This digest, based on the information provided for the directory, describes the different programmatic approaches to bias reduction and violence prevention.

Characteristics of the Projects

Distinguishing characteristics of anti-bias projects for youth, teachers, and caregivers are discussed below.

Underlying Philosophy

Some projects take the practical position that people in a diverse society simply must learn how to live with one another peaceably. Using a behavior modification model, they train people how to refrain from acting on their prejudices, assuming that once people become accustomed to controlling their public expression of biases, their attitudes will naturally begin to soften.

Projects with the reverse perspective—that changes in behavior commonly follow changes in attitude—may be based on various philosophies: secular morality, religion, or politics. These projects have the potential of engendering fundamental reforms in people's belief systems, but their appeal can be limited, because trainees must first accept the validity of the project's philosophy. For example, in order for projects based on Biblical teachings to be effective, trainees must first accept religious moral authority.

Issues Covered

Although most training programs deal with all the issues described below, their emphases can vary greatly.

Prejudice, Bias, and Discrimination Reduction. Some projects assume that the root cause of prejudice is the same regardless of its specific target; their training concentrates on helping people overcome a need to victimize others. A few projects hold the wider view that bias is built into the power relationships in U.S. political and economic institutions, or that individual acts of bias are a reaction to legislation eroding personal autonomy; they encourage trainees to work for social reforms as well as to make personal changes.

Other projects tackle bias almost on a case-by-case basis, discussing reasons why particular groups are targeted and dispelling myths about them. These anti-bias projects are usually components of larger organizations that advocate or provide services for specific ethnic or cultural groups. While they concentrate on discrimination against the group they represent, most also cover bias generally. Conversely, some projects, frequently those with a religious orientation, may not believe in full equality for all segments of society (woman and gays in particular), and may therefore omit references to certain groups in their training.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation. The projects described above that focus on bias reduction believe that conflicts will decrease naturally from an increase in tolerance. Other projects, believing that bias will be reduced in the same manner as other disputes are settled, concentrate on

teaching conflict resolution and mediation skills, and address prejudice as just one cause of conflict among many. While traditional mediation works toward a "win-win" compromise, some of these projects believe that continued expressions of bias are an unacceptable part of a settlement agreement. Further, some conflict resolution trainers are committed to social and economic justice as well as to settling differences between individuals; they will not consider a conflict resolved unless justice is served, even if the disputants agree to a resolution.

Violence Prevention. Here, project differences about whether to focus on attitude or behavior are especially pronounced. The majority of projects deal with violence as but one manifestation of hatred, and expect it to lessen as prejudicial beliefs erode. But a few take the opposite position that learning to channel negative emotions into positive actions will diffuse hatred (regardless of its source or target) and lead automatically to less conflict and violence. These emphasize management of emotions, especially anger.

Others hold that changes in conduct, such as refusing to engage in violence, will lead to better emotional control. These projects usually also treat conflict resolution and violence prevention as separable issues, teaching trainees to diffuse or avoid violent confrontations, regardless of their cause, without attempting to settle the dispute. Changing attitudes toward violence and weapons in general is the core of this approach.

Whereas a goal of some projects may be simply an absence of conflict and violence, others are satisfied only when trainees commit to the principles of active nonviolence—social harmony and justice—as an integral part of their lives.

Training Methods

Projects use both trainers and resource materials, but the mix varies. At one end of the spectrum are programs based almost totally on interaction between trainers and trainees. They may have a basic syllabus to cover, but are guided by concerns raised during role play and group discussion. A few projects send out multicultural training teams as a way of demonstrating harmony in action.

At the other end of the spectrum are projects that rely on printed and audiovisual materials and whose program is almost scripted. Here, trainers function more like traditional classroom teachers, and trainees take a less active role in the learning process. Indeed, some such programs use trainers very little, opting instead to provide teachers with instruction guides for teaching an anti-bias course themselves.

Most projects use a mix of methods; they take a hands-on approach initially, and then leave materials for teachers to use subsequently. Some projects include a return visit by trainers for follow-up and evaluation.

Targeted Populations

The underlying philosophy of a project significantly influences the populations that it trains. Projects focusing on behavior modification usually work only with young people, or train teachers to use an anti-bias curriculum without first undergoing anti-bias training themselves. Projects dealing with bias directly are more apt to train school people and caregivers as well as students, believing that young people will be unable to rid themselves of prejudices that are constantly reinforced by the adults around them. A few projects work only with the staffs of school systems and schools, positing that unless the members of these communities learn to solve their own conflicts constructively, they will not be able to teach students to do so.

Selecting a Project

The service packages of the various projects differ as much as their programs. Therefore, institutions wanting to provide educational anti-bias training must not only select philosophy and emphasis, but also the type and amount of services. Interestingly, some projects with very different philosophies offer very similar programs, so it is important to get a detailed description of program content.

Some projects offer a standard program package that they believe is most effective, while others have modular programs with components that clients can contract for individually, to meet specific needs. Some sell resources for do-it-yourself anti-bias training; others make materials available only as part of their service package.

Most projects charge a fee for service (although some are subsidized by grants); in general the more comprehensive the program and the more sophisticated the materials, the higher the charge. While high fees may seem prohibitive, training may require fewer human and material resources from the school, which can help offset the cost.

— Wendy Schwartz

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This digest is based on *A Directory of Anti-Bias Education Resources and Services*, by Wendy Schwartz with Lynne Elcik. The *Directory* contains profiles of 52 youth anti-bias projects, which are the basis for the discussion here. It also contains an extensive list of books, audiovisual materials, periodicals, curricula, and information sources that promote youth bias reduction and violence prevention. The *Directory* is published by the ERIC/CUE, and is available from the Clearinghouse for $8.00, including handling charges.

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